

3.5 Community Character

OVERVIEW

The pattern of built form reflects the character of a community. Built form attributes include land uses and their integration with other uses; building types, massing, density and their relationship to the street and public spaces; street design and the travel modes that streets are designed for. Consider the image that enters one’s mind when we think of a major city like New York or a small town in Central Texas. Even without ever visiting these places, you likely have an image of how the built form shapes the character, whether it be soaring skyscrapers that edge bustling sidewalks and streets, three-story townhouses densely lined along a narrow neighborhood street, or the intimate main street lined with smaller shops, restaurants and businesses. In the case of Bee Cave, you might imagine the vastness of the landscape, where wide-open spaces allow for glimpses of the Texas Hill Country.

The unique character of Bee Cave– from the layout of its streets to the design of individual buildings – reflect both its natural settings as well as the needs of residents. Historically, Bee Cave is a rural community that benefits from inviting Hill Country views that are experienced while traveling along winding roads, or captured from neighborhood vantage points. Because of the predominantly low-density developments of this growing suburban community, the automobile has served most residents well, providing access to commercial and public destinations along most major roadways. In this section, we will examine how built form has shaped community character by responding to resident needs, which are important to consider as these needs may change within a growing community.

The Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos metropolitan region experienced the third fastest growth rate in the country between 2000 and 2010, according to U.S. Census data, with a 37.3% increase in employment. As discussed in previous sections, this growth has impacted the City of Bee Cave, which experienced a 29.3% population increase in that time period, and has continued to grow. Continuing to develop through low-moderate density form is presenting challenges to the amount of land available and the roadway capacity in Bee Cave. This



Commercial signage, roadway signage, and landscape

Where are we now?

- Unique, natural setting is attractive to residents.
- Rapidly developing city means that we are losing our “small town” character.
- Mix of suburban and rural neighborhoods, with a contemporary town center.

What is our Vision?

- Characterized by scenic Hill Country setting and friendly, small town character.
- A unique and memorable design quality, tailored to natural and cultural context.
- Compatible scale and harmonious building materials.

Comprehensive Plan update comes at a crucial time to determine how the residents of Bee Cave envision its future and establish a balance of character preservation while accommodating increased development.

A range of different neighborhoods can be found within Bee Cave, with characteristics ranging from rural to urban. It will be vital to understand and define which areas can best accommodate the City’s new growth and development, and which areas should be preserved as

lower-density rural areas to protect the neighborhoods, natural areas, and views that define Bee Cave’s traditional character. These different neighborhood areas are defined by similar design features (see Figure 3-5) should be used as a guide for land use, development, and public investment to help Bee Cave achieve a balanced identity that combines the best characteristics of the Texas Hill Country and the amenities and quality of life that can come with new growth and development.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER GOALS & STRATEGIES

Goal CC-1:

Promote a strong and unique sense of community through landmarks, local businesses, and community assets that reinforce the City of Bee Cave’s charm and integrity as that of a small town.

Despite its short history, the City of Bee Cave has a unique character derived from its rural context in the Texas Hill Country, as well as its suburban and urban settings, cultural landmarks and proximity to one of the largest cities in Texas. During the public engagement process, many residents expressed a strong appreciation for the unique small-town personality of Bee Cave and were concerned that the pace of growth and new development may present a threat of becoming an “Anytown USA.” The 2009 Comprehensive Plan described the “sameness” that is often inherent to communities within the same geographic area. The lack of design variety, especially along major corridors tends to create anonymity in a region.

Identifying the City’s historic and emerging landmarks and character areas is an important step in ensuring that the integrity of Bee Cave is preserved as the City grows and evolves. Ensuring that natural space and older neighborhoods are preserved is important, as are programs that cultivate local businesses and create new types of denser development that can accommodate new growth. Connecting these landmarks and providing access, through both physical links and the provision of information and wayfinding, will be an important part of strengthening the City’s character and developing a unique brand that can support the City’s economic development initiatives.

Continuing to develop through low-density form is presenting challenges to the amount of land available and the roadway capacity in Bee Cave. This Comprehensive Plan update comes at a crucial time to determine how the residents of Bee Cave envision its future and establish a balance of character preservation amidst increased development.

- 5.1 Support existing local businesses and facilitate the creation of new local and national businesses in Bee Cave.
- 5.2 Support existing venues for festivals, arts, and cultural events, both private and public, and encourage the development of new venues as necessary.
- 5.3 Identify and promote the City of Bee Cave’s cultural and community assets (e.g., Central Park, scenic viewpoints, and schools). The City can work with partners to strengthen the Bee Cave brand through signage and identification of historic and cultural assets.
- 5.4. Ensure that Bee Cave’s community and cultural assets are well-connected and integrated into the City’s transportation network, and maintain Bee Cave’s Central Business District and Bee Cave Central Park as central focal points and activity centers. This will increase opportunities for interaction among Bee Cave residents, provide a sense of space and shared identity, and increase opportunities for commerce and tourism.

Goal CC-2:

Ensure that Bee Cave is balanced in its array of residential and commercial land uses, and offers quality, livable suburban and semi-rural settings, offering greater choice among neighborhoods and lifestyles, while preserving Bee Cave’s natural assets.

Bee Cave is at a point where it may no longer be sustainable to simply preserve and encourage low-density residential development. Its small-town character, natural beauty, excellent school district, and convenient location have attracted many more residents and created a strong market for a more diverse range of housing, office, and retail development. As in any city with a strong market and significant new development, it is crucial to develop a cohesive framework to guide this new development and ensure that new neighborhoods become part of a cohesive whole. For Bee Cave, it is important to identify and communicate how new development, across a range of densities and typologies, can strengthen the City’s character and quality of life.

- 5.5 Develop new guiding policy to integrate urban design objectives with other planning mechanisms, such as land use, zoning and subdivision regulations, economic development, and environmental preservation. The site design, landscaping, and signage guidelines are extensive and well defined, but do not reflect the need for more walkable areas within Bee Cave. The development standards should reflect both the neighborhood character designations (Core, Suburban, Semi-Rural) and the existing design guidelines in the zoning and subdivision guidelines. (See also HN 4.13)
- 5.6 Encourage conservation development in areas designated for low density residential to protect rural character.
- 5.7 Ensure that new development addresses established pedestrian and bicycle networks and is coordinated with the Hike and Bike Connectivity Plan.

Goal CC-3:

Develop a unique and memorable design quality, tailored to our natural and cultural context to compatible scale and harmonious building materials.

The phrase “Hill Country Character” is often used to describe the aesthetic Bee Cave and the neighboring communities derive from the surrounding context. Often this references a historic style – smaller dwellings and shops built from local materials that blend into the landscape. However, as Bee Cave grows, the City faces the challenge of adding new building typologies and modern uses while retaining the integrity of the “Hill Country Character.” Identifying exactly what this means in terms of architecture and urban design is the first step towards developing a common language that will help new uses and projects relate to the landscape and strengthen the City’s identity as it evolves. Much local architecture makes use of local materials, including a pale brown limestone that blends well with the surrounding landscape. Masonry and muted earth tones are common and also provide a connection to the surrounding landscape. The Hill Country Galleria is one successful example of an urban environment within a rural context. It’s likely to have an impression on people’s mental image of the City of Bee Cave, as it often resembles the old Main Street qualities of historic towns, while utilizing a more modern architectural aesthetic that also makes significant use of local materials, and a color palate in line with residential development.

- 5.8 Use the Comprehensive Plan definition of “Hill Country Character” and associated graphics to help guide decisions concerning both private development and public investment. (See Chapter 4 for the Companion Guides).
- 5.9 Maintain design guidelines for nonresidential properties fronting along major thoroughfares, specifically SH 71, R.M. 620, and Bee Cave Road, Bee Cave Parkway and Hamilton Pool Road, as well as the Overlay Character Areas recommended in the Future Land Use element.

Goal CC-4:

Develop a unique and memorable design quality that elevates the appearance of the public realm in Bee Cave, and builds on the City's natural Hill Country setting: the public spaces, key intersections and major corridors, as well as local roads and neighborhood nodes.

Consider the development of a public space master plan and/or streetscape design guidelines to enhance the community's aesthetic and functional appeal. The public space (sometimes called the public realm) plays a critical role in an area's character and function, serving overlapping roles including circulation and access, development framework, public open space, and visual interest. Whether a local street, a major thoroughfare, or a town square, the public realm is where residents and visitors interact with each other, and a key opportunity for a city to project its identity and character. Coordination with the updated Mobility Element of the Comprehensive Plan is important to ensure that streets and trails are not only functional, but work to strengthen the character of Bee Cave by connecting important landmarks as well as aesthetic and performative design criteria.

- 5.10 Develop guidelines for major intersections that prioritize the public realm and the quality of the street design. Intersections can present potentially dangerous conflicts between motorists and bikers or pedestrians. Complete street guidelines for intersections should consider all users and may include standards for pedestrian crossings and placement, pavement or markers, shorter crossings, signage, signal timing, medians, and lighting.



Galleria Walkway